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THE MOUSE-TRAP

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"'WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS IT?'"

THE MOUSE-TRAP

THE MOUSE-TRAP

Farce

BY

W. D. HOWELLS

ILLUSTRATED

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"'WHAT IS IT? WHAT IS IT?'" . . . . *Frontispiece*

"'THERE NEVER WAS ANY MOUSE HERE'" *Facing page* 42

THE MOUSE-TRAP

I

MRS. SOMERS; MR. CAMPBELL

IN her drawing-room, Mrs. Amy Somers, young, pretty, stylish, in the last evanescent traces of widowhood, stands confronting Mr. Willis Campbell. She has a newspaper in her hand, folded to the width of a single column, which she extends towards him with an effect of indignant menace.

Mrs. Somers: "Then you acknowledge that it is yours?"

Campbell: "I acknowledge that I made a speech before the legislative committee on behalf of the anti-suffragists. You knew I was going to do that. I don't know how they've reported it."

Mrs. Somers, with severity: "Very well,

then; I will read it. 'Willis Campbell, Esq., was next heard on behalf of the petitioners. He touched briefly upon the fact that the suffrage was evidently not desired by the vast majority of educated women.'"

Campbell: "You've always said they didn't want it."

Mrs. Somers: "That is not the point." Reading: "'And many of them would feel it an onerous burden, and not a privilege.'"

Campbell: "Well, didn't you—"

Mrs. Somers: "Don't interrupt!" Reading: "'Which would compel them, at the cost of serious sacrifices, to contend at the polls with the ignorant classes who would be sure to exercise the right if conferred.'"

Campbell: "That was your own argument, Amy. They're almost your own words."

Mrs. Somers: "That isn't what I object to." Reading: "'Mr. Campbell then referred in a more humorous strain to the argument, frequently used by the suffragists, that every tax-payer should have

the right to vote. He said that he objected to this, because it implied that non-tax-payers should not have the right to vote, which would deprive of the suffrage a large body of adoptive citizens, who voted at all the elections with great promptness and assiduity. He thought the exemption of women from some duties required of men by the State fairly offset the loss of the ballot in their case, and that until we were prepared to send ladies to battle we ought not to oblige them to go to the polls. Some skirmishing ensued between Mr. Campbell and Mr. Willington, on the part of the suffragists, the latter gentleman affirming that in great crises of the world's history women had shown as much courage as men, and the former contending that this did not at all affect his position, since the courage of women was in high degree a moral courage, which was not evoked by the ordinary conditions of peace or war, but required the imminence of some extraordinary, some vital emergency.' "

Campbell : " Well, what do you object to in all that ?"

Mrs. Somers, tossing the paper on the table, and confronting him with her head lifted and her hands clasped upon her left side: "Everything! It is an insult to women."

Campbell: "*Woman*, you mean. I don't think *women* would mind it. Who's been talking to you, Amy?"

Mrs. Somers: "Nobody. It doesn't matter who's been talking to me. That is not the question."

Campbell: "It's the question I asked."

Mrs. Somers: "It isn't the question *I* asked. I wish simply to know what you mean by that speech."

Campbell: "I wish you knew how pretty you look in that dress." Mrs. Somers involuntarily glances down at the skirt of it on either side, and rearranges it a little, folding her hands again as before. "But perhaps you do."

Mrs. Somers, with dignity: "Will you answer my question?"

Campbell: "Certainly. I meant what I said."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, you did! Very well, then! When a woman stands by

the bedside of her sick child, and risks her life from contagion, what kind of courage do you call that?"

Campbell: "Moral."

Mrs. Somers: "And when she remains in a burning building or a sinking ship—as they often do—and perishes, while her child is saved, what kind of courage is it?"

Campbell: "Moral."

Mrs. Somers: "When she seizes an axe and defends her little ones against a bear or a wolf that's just bursting in the cabin door, what kind of courage does she show?"

Campbell: "Moral."

Mrs. Somers: "Or when her babe crawls up the track, and she snatches it from the very jaws of the cow-catcher—"

Campbell: "Oh, hold on, now, Amy! Be fair! It's the engineer who does that: he runs along the side of the locomotive, and catches the smiling infant up, and lays it in the mother's arms as the train thunders by. His name is usually Hank Rollins. The mother is always paralyzed with terror."

Mrs. Somers: "Of course she is. But

in those other cases how does her courage differ from a man's? If hers is always moral, what kind of courage does a man show when he faces the cannon?"

Campbell: "Immoral. Come, Amy, are you trying to prove that women are braver than men? Well, they are. I never was in any danger yet that I didn't wish I was a woman, for then I should have the courage to face it, or else I could turn and run without disgrace. All that I said in that speech was that women haven't so much nerve as men."

Mrs. Somers: "They have more."

Campbell: "Nerves—yes."

Mrs. Somers: "No, nerve. Take Dr. Cissy Gay, that little, slender, delicate, sensitive thing: what do you suppose she went through when she was studying medicine, and walking the hospitals, and all those disgusting things? And Mrs. J. Plunkett Harmon: do you mean to say that *she* has no nerve, facing all sorts of audiences, on the platform, everywhere? Or Rev. Lily Barber, living down all that ridicule, and going quietly on in her work—"

Campbell: "Oh, *they've* been talking to you."

Mrs. Somers: "They have *not!* And if they have, Dr. Gay is as much opposed to suffrage as you are."

Campbell: "As *I?* Aren't you opposed to it too?"

Mrs. Somers: "Of course I am. Or I was till you made that speech."

Campbell: "It wasn't exactly intended to convert you."

Mrs. Somers: "It has placed me in a false position. Everybody knows, or the same as knows, that we're engaged—"

Campbell: "Well, *I'm* not ashamed of it, Amy."

Mrs. Somers, severely: "No matter! And now it will look as if I had no ideas of my own, and was just swayed about any way by you. A woman is despicable that joins with men in ridiculing women."

Campbell: "Who's been saying that?"

Mrs. Somers: "No one. It doesn't matter who's been saying it. Mrs. Mervane has been saying it."

Campbell: "Mrs. Mervane?"

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, Mrs. Mervane, that

you're always praising and admiring so for her good sense and her right ideas. Didn't you say she wrote as logically and forcibly as a man?"

Campbell: "Yes, I did."

Mrs. Somers: "Very well, then, she says that if anything could turn her in favor of suffrage, it is that speech of yours. She says it's a subtle attack upon the whole sex."

Campbell: "Well, I give it up! You are all alike. You take everything personally, in the first place, and then you say it's an attack on all women. Couldn't I make this right by publishing a card to acknowledge your physical courage before the whole community, Amy? Then your friends would have to say that I had recognized the pluck of universal womanhood."

Mrs. Somers: "No, sir; you can't make it right now. And I'm sorry, sorry, *sorry* I signed the anti-suffrage petition. Nothing will ever teach men to appreciate women till women practically assert themselves."

Campbell: "That sounds very much like another quotation, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "And they must expect to be treated as cowards till they show themselves heroes. And they must first of all have the ballot."

Campbell: "Oh!"

Mrs. Somers: "Yes. Then, and not till then, men will acknowledge their equality in all that is admirable in both. Then there will be no more puling insolence about moral courage and vital emergencies to evoke it."

Campbell: "I don't see the steps to this conclusion, but the master-mind of Mrs. J. Plunkett Harmon reaches conclusions at a bound."

Mrs. Somers: "It *wasn't* Mrs. Harmon."

Campbell: "Oh, well, Rev. Lily Barber, then. You needn't tell me *you* originated that stuff, Amy. But I submit for the present. Think it over, my dear, and when I come back to-morrow—"

Mrs. Somers: "Perhaps you had better not come back to-morrow."

Campbell: "Why?"

Mrs. Somers: "Because—because I'm afraid we are not in sympathy. Because

if you thought that I needed some vital emergency to make me show that I was ready to die for you any moment—"

Campbell: "*Die* for me? I want you to live for me, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "—and the emergency never came, you would despise me."

Campbell: "Never!"

Mrs. Somers: "If you have such a low opinion of women generally—"

Campbell: "*I* a low opinion of women!"

Mrs. Somers: "You said they were cowards."

Campbell: "I didn't say they were cowards. And if I seemed to say so, it was my misfortune. I honestly and truly think, Amy, that when a women is roused, she isn't afraid of anything in heaven or on—" He stops abruptly, and looks towards the corner of the room.

Mrs. Somers: "What is it?"

Campbell: "Oh, nothing. I thought I saw a mouse."

Mrs. Somers: "A mouse!" She flings herself upon him, and clutches him with convulsive energy. Then suddenly free-

ing him, she leaps upon a chair, and stoops over to hold her train from the floor. "Oh, drive it out, drive it *out!* Don't *kill* it. Oh—e-e-e-e! *Drive* it out! Oh, what shall I do? Oh, Willis, love, jump on a chair! Oh, horrid little dreadful reptile! Oh, *drive* it out!" In uttering these appeals Mrs. Somers alternately looses her hold upon her train in order to clasp her face in her hands, and then uncovers her face to seize her train. "Oh, is it *gone?* Come here, Willis, and let me hold your hand! Or no! Drive it, drive it, *drive* it out!"

Campbell, going about the room in deliberate examination: "*I* can't find it. I guess it's gone into its hole again."

Mrs. Somers: "No, it hasn't! It hasn't got any hole here. It must have come in from somewhere else. Oh, I *hope* I shall have a little wisdom *some* time, and never, never, never have cake and wine brought into the drawing-room again, no matter *how* faint with walking any one is. Of course it was the smell of the fruit and crumbs attracted it; and they might just as well take the horse-cars, but they said

they had walked all the way to get me to sign the suffrage petition, and when I said I'd signed the anti-suffrage, of course I had to offer them something; I couldn't do less. Have you driven it out?"

Campbell: "I've done my best. But I can't find it, and I can't drive it out till I *do* find it."

Mrs. Somers: "It's run into the fire-place. Rattle the tongs!" Campbell goes to the fire-place and rattles the tongs against the shovel, Mrs. Somers meanwhile covering her face. "Ow — ugh — e-e-e-e! Is it gone?" She uncovers her eyes.

Campbell: "It never was there."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, it was, Willis. Don't tell me it wasn't! Where else was it if it wasn't there? Look under that book-table!"

Campbell: "Which one?"

Mrs. Somers: "That one with the shelf coming down almost to the carpet. Poke under it with the poker!" As Campbell obeys, she again hides her face. "U-u-u-gh! Is it gone *now?*"

Campbell: "It wasn't there."

Mrs. Somers: "Poke hard! Bang against the mop-board! Bang!"

Campbell, poking and banging: "There! I tell you it never was there."

Mrs. Somers, uncovering her face: "Oh, what shall I do? It must be somewhere in the room, and I never can breathe till you've found it. Bang again!"

Campbell: "Nonsense! It's gone long ago. Do you suppose a mouse of any presence of mind or self-respect would stay here after all this uproar?" He restores the tongs to their stand with a clash.

Mrs. Somers, responsive to the clash: "Ow!"

Campbell, advancing towards her and extending his hand: "Come, Amy; get down now. I must be going."

Mrs. Somers, in horror: "Get down? Going?"

Campbell: "Certainly. I can't stay here all day. I've got to follow that mouse out into the street and have him arrested. It's a public duty."

Mrs. Somers: "Don't throw ridicule on it!" After a moment: "You know I

can't let you go till I've seen that mouse leave this room. Go all round, and stamp in the corners." She covers her face again. "Ugh!"

Campbell: "How are you going to see him leave the room if you won't look? He's left long ago. *I* wouldn't stay if I was a mouse. And I've got to go, anyway."

Mrs. Somers, uncovering her face: "No! I beg, I *command* you to stay, or I shall never get out of this room alive. You *know* I sha'n't." A ring at the street door is heard. "Oh, *dear*, what shall I do? I've told Jane I would see anybody that called, and now I daren't step my foot to the floor! What *shall* I do?"

Campbell, with authority: "You must get down. There's no mouse here, I tell you; and if people come and find you standing on a chair in your drawing-room, what will they think?"

Mrs. Somers: "I can kneel on it." She drops to her knees on the chair. "There!"

Campbell: "That's no better. It's worse."

Mrs. Somers, listening to the party at the door below, which the maid has opened: "'Sh! I want to make out who it is. 'Sh! Yes—it is!" After listening: "Yes; it's Mrs. Miller and Lou Bemis and Mrs. Curwen! I don't see how they happen to come together, for Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Curwen perfectly hate each other. Oh yes! I know! They're all on the way to Mrs. Ransom's reception; he's showing his pictures and some of her things — horrid daubs; I don't see how she can have the face—and they've met here by accident. 'Sh! She's showing them into the reception-room. Yes, that's quite right." Mrs. Somers delivers these sentences in a piercing whisper of extreme volubility. "Now, as soon as she brings up their cards, I'll say I'm not at all well — that I'm engaged — just going out. No, that won't do. I *must* be sick. Anything else would be perfectly insulting after saying that I was at home; and Jane has got to go back and tell them she forgot that I had gone to bed with a severe headache." As Jane appears at the drawing-room door, and falters at

sight of Mrs. Somers kneeling on her chair, that lady beckons her to her, frowning, shaking her head, and pressing her finger on her lip to enforce silence, and takes the cards from her, while she continues in whisper: "Yes. All right, Jane! Go straight back and tell them you forgot I had gone to bed with a perfectly blinding headache; and don't let another soul into the house. Mr. Campbell saw a mouse, and I can't get down till he's caught it. Go!"

II

JANE; MRS. SOMERS; MR. CAMPBELL; then MRS. MILLER; MRS. CURWEN; MRS. BEMIS

Jane, after a moment of petrifaction: "A mouse! In the room, here? Oh, my goodness gracious me!" She leaps upon the chair next to Mrs. Somers, who again springs to her feet.

Mrs. Somers: "Did you *see* it? Oh, e-e-e-e!"

Jane: "W-o-o-o-o! I don't know!

Where was it? Oh yes, I thought—" They clutch each other convulsively, and blend their cries, at the sound of which the ladies in the reception-room below come flocking up-stairs into the drawing-room.

The Ladies, at sight of Mrs. Somers and her servant: "What is it? what is it?"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, there's a *mouse* in the room! Oh, jump on chairs!"

Mrs. Miller, vaulting into the middle of the sofa: "A mouse!"

Mrs. Lou Bemis, alighting upon a slight reception-chair: "Oh, not in *this* room, Mrs. Somers! *Don't* say it!"

Mrs. Curwen, with a laugh of mingled terror and enjoyment, from the top of the table where she finds herself: "Where is it?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know. I didn't see it. But, oh! it's here somewhere. Mr. Campbell saw it, and Jane did when she came up with your cards, and he's been trying to drive it out, but he can't even *budge* it; and—"

Campbell, desperately: "Ladies, there

isn't any mouse here! I've been racketing round here with the shovel and tongs all over the room, and the mouse is gone. You can depend upon that. You're as safe here as you would be in your own rooms."

Mrs. Somers: "How can you say such a thing? No, I won't be responsible if anything happens. The mouse is in this room. No one has seen it go out, and it's here still."

Mrs. Bemis, balancing herself with difficulty on her chair: "Oh dear! how tippy it is! I'm sure it's going to break."

Mrs. Curwen: "Get up here with me, Mrs. Bemis. We can protect each other."

Mrs. Miller: "You would both fall off. Better come here on the sofa, Mrs. Bemis."

Mrs. Curwen: "The mouse could run up that ottoman sofa as easily as the ground."

Mrs. Miller, covering her face: "Oh, how can you say such a thing?"

Mrs. Bemis: "Oh, I know I'm going to fall!"

Mrs. Somers: "Willis, for shame! Help her!"

Campbell: "But how—how can I help—"

Mrs. Somers: "Get her another chair."

Campbell: "Oh!" He pushes a large arm-chair towards Mrs. Bemis, who leaps into it with a wild cry, spurning the reception-chair half across the room in her flight.

Mrs. Bemis: "Oh, thank you, thank you, Mr. Campbell! Oh, I shall always bless you!"

Mrs. Curwen: "Yes, you have saved all our lives. Where there's a man, I don't care for a thousand mice."

Mrs. Miller: "Oh, how very frank!"

Mrs. Curwen: "Yes, I'm nothing if not open-minded."

Campbell, surveying her with amusement and interest: "I don't believe you're very much scared."

Mrs. Bemis: "Oh yes, she is, Mr. Campbell. She keeps up that way, and then the first thing she faints."

Mrs. Curwen: "Not on centre-tables, my dear; there isn't room."

Campbell, with increasing fascination: "Why don't you get down, and set the rest an example of courage?"

Mrs. Curwen: "I prefer to set the example here: it's safer."

Campbell: "You look like the statue of some goddess on her altar—or saint—"

Mrs. Curwen: "Thank you. If you will say victim, I will agree with you. Say Iphigenia. But the others are too much. I draw the line at goddesses and saints."

Campbell: "And *you're* afraid of mice, too?"

Mrs. Curwen: "To be sure I am."

Campbell: "Well, there is no mouse down here—nothing but a miserable man. Now, will you get down?"

Mrs. Somers: "Mrs. Curwen, don't think of it! He's just *saying* it. The mouse *is* there." To Campbell: "You are placing us all in a very ridiculous position."

Campbell: "I am sorry for that; I am, indeed. I give you my word of honor that I don't believe there's any mouse in the room."

Mrs. Somers: "Jane just saw it."

Campbell: "She *thought* she saw it, but I don't think she did. A lion would

have been scared out by this time." A ring at the door is heard.

Mrs. Somers: "There, Jane, there's some one ringing! You must go to the door."

Jane, throwing her apron over her head: "Oh, please, Mrs. Somers, I can't go! I'm so afraid of mice!"

Mrs. Somers: "Nonsense! you *must* go. It's perfectly ridiculous your pretending not."

Jane: "Oh, I couldn't, Mrs. Somers! I was always so from a child. I can't bear 'em."

Mrs. Somers: "This is disgraceful! Do you mean to say that you won't do what I ask you? Very well, then; you can *go!* You needn't stay the week out; I will pay you, and you can go at once. Do you understand?"

Jane: "Yes, I do, and I'd be glad to go this very minute, but I don't dare to get down."

Mrs. Somers: "But why shouldn't you get down? There isn't the least danger. Is there any danger now, Mr. Campbell?"

Campbell: "Not the least in the world. Mouse gone long ago."

Mrs. Somers: "There!"

Jane: "I can't help it. There are so many in the dining-room—"

Mrs. Somers: "In *my* dining-room? Oh, my goodness! why didn't you tell me before?"

Jane: "And one ran right over my foot."

Mrs. Somers: "Your foot? Oh, I wonder that you live to tell it! Why haven't you put traps? Where's the cat?"

Jane: "The cook's spoiled the cat, feeding it so much."

Mrs. Miller: "Yes, that's the worst of cooks: they always spoil cats."

Mrs. Bemis: "They overfeed them."

Mrs. Miller: "And then, of course, the cats are worth nothing as mousers. I had a cat—" The bell sounds again.

Mrs. Somers: "There! Some one *must* go."

Campbell: "Why, *I'll* go to the door."

Mrs. Somers: "And leave *us* here? Never! How can you propose such a

thing? If you dare to go, I shall die. Don't think of such a thing."

Jane: "The cook will go, if they keep ringing. Oh! ugh! hu, hu! When ever shall I get out of this?"

Mrs. Somers: "Stop crying, Jane! Be calm! You're perfectly safe. You may be glad it's no worse. 'Sh! There's the cook going to the door at last. Who can it be? Listen!"

Jane, clutching Mrs. Somers: "Oh! ugh! Wo-o-o-o!"

All the Ladies: "E-e-e-e!"

Mrs. Somers: "What's the *matter*, Jane? Let me go! *What's* the matter?"

Jane: "Oh, I thought I was falling—right down in among it!"

Mrs. Agnes Roberts, calling up from below: "What in the world *is* it, Amy?"

Campbell: "Oh, my prophetic soul, my sister!"

Mrs. Somers, shouting: "Is that you, Agnes? Don't come up! Don't come up, for your *life! Don't* come up, unless you wish to perish instantly. Oh, it's dreadful, your coming now. Keep away!

Go right straight out of the house, unless you wish to fling your life away."

The other Ladies: "Don't come! Don't come! Keep away! It will do no good."

III

MRS. ROBERTS and the OTHERS

Mrs. Roberts, mounting the stairs, as if lured to her doom by an irresistible fascination: "Not come? Keep away? Who's talking? What is it? Oh, *Amy*, what is it?" As she reaches the stair-landing space before the drawing-room and looks in, where Campbell stands in the middle of the floor with his hands in his pockets and despair in his face: "You here, Willis? What are you doing? What is it?" Her eye wanders to the ladies trembling in their several refuges, and a dawning apprehension makes itself seen in her face. "What is— Oh, it is—it isn't—it isn't a —mouse! Oh, *Amy!* Amy! Amy! Oh, how *could* you let me come right into the room with it? Oh, I never can forgive

you! I thought it was somebody getting killed. Oh, why didn't you *tell* me it was a mouse?" She alights on the piano-stool, and keeps it from rocking by staying herself with one hand on the piano-top.

Campbell: "Now look here, Agnes—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Hush! Don't speak to me, Willis! You unnatural, cruel, heartless— Why did *you* let me come in? I wonder at you, Willis! If you had been *half* the brother you ought to be— Oh dear, dear! I know how you will go away and laugh now, and tell everybody. I suppose you think it corroborates that silly speech of yours before the legislative committee that's wounded all your best friends so, and that I've been talking myself perfectly dumb defending you about." Mrs. Roberts unconsciously gives a little push for emphasis, and the stool revolves with her. "E-e-e-e! Oh, Amy, how can you have one of these old-fashioned, horrid, whirling things, fit for nothing but boarding-house parlors!"

Mrs. Somers, with just pique: "I'm very sorry you don't like my piano-stool, Ag-

nes. I keep it because it was my poor mother's; but if you'll give me due notice another time, I'll try to have a different—"

Mrs. Roberts, bursting into tears: "Oh, don't say another word, Amy dear! I'm so ashamed of myself that I can hardly breathe now!"

Campbell: "And I'm ashamed of you too, Agnes! Get down off that stool, and behave yourself like a sensible woman." He goes towards her as if to lift her down. "The mouse is gone long ago. And if it was here, it wouldn't bite you."

Mrs. Roberts, repelling him with one hand while she clings insecurely to the piano with the other: "Bite? Do you suppose I care for a mouse's *biting*, Willis? I wouldn't care for the bite of an elephant. It's the *idea*. Can't you understand?"

The other Ladies: "Oh yes, it's the idea."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, I told him in the first place, Agnes, that it was the *idea* of a mouse."

Mrs. Curwen: "It's the innate repugnance."

Campbell: "It's the enmity put between the mouse that tempted Eve and the woman—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Don't be—sacrilegious, Willis! Don't, for your own sake!"

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, it's very easy to make fun of the Bible."

Mrs. Roberts: "Or woman. And the wit is equally contemptible in either case."

Mrs. Miller: "Other animals feel about mice just as we do. I was reading only the other day of an elephant—your mentioning an elephant reminded me of it, Mrs.—"

Mrs. Roberts: "Oh!"

The other Ladies: "E-e-e-e!"

Mrs. Somers: "What is it?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Nothing. I thought I was going to fall. Go on, Mrs. Miller."

Mrs. Miller: "Oh, it's merely that the elephant was asleep, and a mouse ran up its trunk—"

All the Ladies: "Horrors!"

Mrs. Miller: "And the poor creature sprang up in the greatest alarm, and bellowed till it woke the whole menagerie. It simply shows that it isn't because

women are nervously constituted that they're afraid of mice, for the nervous organism of an elephant—"

Mrs. Somers: "The first time I went to Europe I found a mouse in one of *my* trunks. It was a steamer trunk, that you push under the berth, and I've perfectly loathed them ever since."

Mrs. Bemis: "Once in a farm-house where we were staying the summer, a mouse ran right across the table."

All the Ladies: "Oh!"

Mrs. Curwen: "One morning I found one in the bath-tub."

All the Ladies: "*Oh*, Mrs. Curwen!"

Mrs. Curwen: "We'd heard it scrambling round all night. It was stone-dead."

All the Ladies: "Hideous!"

Campbell: "Why, bless my soul! if the mouse was dead—"

Mrs. Somers: "Then it was ten times as bad as if it was alive. Can't you understand? It's the *idea*. But, oh, don't let's talk of it any more, ladies! Let's talk of something else. Agnes, are you going to Mrs. Ransom's?"

Mrs. Roberts: "I've been. Nearly everybody's coming away."

Mrs. Miller: "Why, what time is it, Mrs. Somers?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know."

Campbell, looking at his watch: "It's ten minutes of six, and I've missed my appointment."

Mrs. Curwen: "And if we don't go now we shall miss the reception."

Mrs. Bemis: "Papa was very particular I should go, because he couldn't."

Mrs. Miller: "We must go at once."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, I'm so sorry! Jane, go down with the ladies."

Jane: "Oh, *please*, Mrs. Somers!"

Mrs. Miller: "But how are we to go? We are imprisoned here. We cannot get away. You must do something."

Mrs. Curwen: "It is your house, Mrs. Somers. You are responsible."

Mrs. Somers: "But what can I do? I can't get down myself. And if I did, what good would it do?"

Mrs. Roberts: "For shame, Willis, to laugh!"

Campbell: "I wasn't laughing. I was merely smiling aloud."

Mrs. Roberts: "It's the same thing. You ought to think of something."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh yes, do, Willis. Think of something for my—for goodness' sake, and I will always thank you. You're so ingenious."

Campbell: "Well, in the first place, I don't believe there's any mouse in the room."

Mrs. Somers: "That is nonsense; Jane saw it. Is that all your ingenuity amounts to?"

Mrs. Roberts, electrically: "Amy, *I* have an idea!"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, Agnes! How *like* you!"

Mrs. Roberts: "Not at all. It's the simplest thing in the world. It's the only way. And no thanks to Willis, either."

All the Ladies: "Well? Well? Well?"

Mrs. Roberts: "It's just this: all make a rush, one after another, and the rest scream. And Willis must keep beating the floor."

Mrs. Somers: "How perfectly mag-

nificent! Well, Agnes, you *have* got your wits about you! It is the very thing! Now, Mrs. Curwen, if you will jump down and make a rush—"

Mrs. Curwen: "It's for you to make the rush first, Mrs. Somers. You are the hostess."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, but I'm not going, don't you see? I've sent my card to Mrs. Ransom."

Mrs. Curwen: "Then, Mrs. Miller, will you, please—"

Mrs. Miller: "Mrs. Bemis is nearest the door. I think she will wish to start first."

Mrs. Bemis: "No; I will wait for the rest."

Mrs. Somers: "That is a good idea. They ought to all rush together, not one after another. Don't you think so, Agnes?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes, that was what I meant. And we ought to all scream just before they start, so as to scare it."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, how capital! You *have* got a brain, Agnes! *Now* I begin to believe we shall live through it. And

Mr. Campbell ought to beat the floor first, oughtn't he?"

Campbell: "I haven't got anything to beat it with." He looks about the room. "But I can go down and get my cane."

All: "No!"

Mrs. Somers: "Jane will go down and get it for you."

Jane: "Oh, I couldn't, Mrs. Somers!"

Campbell: "Perhaps the poker—but it would spoil your carpet."

Mrs. Somers: "No matter for the carpet; you can beat it into—pulp." Campbell gets the poker and beats the carpet in different places. "Harder! Beat harder!"

Mrs. Roberts: "You're not beating at all, Willis. You're just — temporizing." Campbell wildly thrashes the carpet.

Mrs. Somers: "There! that is something like. Now scream, Agnes! Scream, Mrs. Curwen! Mrs. Miller, Lou, scream, please!"

All: "E-e-e-e!"

Mrs. Somers: "But nobody started!"

Mrs. Curwen: "I didn't believe the rest would start, and so *I* didn't."

Mrs. Miller: "I was sure no one else would start."

Mrs. Bemis: "So was I."

Mrs. Roberts: "We must have faith in each other, or else the plan's a failure. Now all scream!" They scream.

Mrs. Somers: "E-e-e-e! Keep beating the carpet, Willis! Hard, hard, hard!" The other ladies all leap down from their perches, and rush screaming out of the drawing-room, followed by Jane, with a whoop that prolongs itself into the depths of the basement, after the retreating wails and hysterical laughter of the ladies have died out of the street door. "Oh, wasn't it splendid? It was a perfect success."

IV

MRS. SOMERS; MR. CAMPBELL

Campbell, leaning on his poker, and panting with exhaustion: "They got out alive."

Mrs. Somers: "And it was all Agnes's idea. Why, Agnes is gone too!"

Campbell: "Yes, Agnes is gone. I think it was a ruse of hers to save her own life. She's quite capable of it."

Mrs. Somers, with justice: "No, I don't think that. She was just carried away by the excitement of the moment."

Campbell: "At any rate, she's gone. And now, Amy, don't you think you'd better get down?"

Mrs. Somers, in astonishment: "Get *down?* Why, you must be crazy. How can I get down if it's still there?"

Campbell: "What?"

Mrs. Somers: "The mouse."

Campbell: "But it *isn't* there, my dear. You saw for yourself that it wasn't there."

Mrs. Somers: "Did you see it run out?"

Campbell: "No; but—"

Mrs. Somers: "Very well, then, it's there still. Of course it is. I wouldn't get down for worlds."

Campbell: "Oh, good heavens! Do you expect to spend the rest of your life up there in that chair?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know. I shall not get down till I see that mouse leave this room."

Campbell, desperately: "Well, then, I must make a clean breast of it. There never was any mouse here."

Mrs. Somers: "What do you mean?"

Campbell: "I mean that when we were talking — arguing — about the physical courage of women, I thought I would try a mouse. It's succeeded only too well. I'll never try another."

Mrs. Somers: "And could you really be guilty of such a cruel—"

Campbell: "Yes."

Mrs. Somers: "Shameless—"

Campbell: "I was."

Mrs. Somers: "Despicable deception?"

Campbell: "It was vile, I know, but I did it."

Mrs. Somers: "I don't believe it. No, rather than believe that of *you*, Willis, I would believe there were a million mice in the room."

Campbell: "Amy, indeed—"

Mrs. Somers: "No; if you could deceive me then, you can deceive me now. If you could say there was a mouse in the room when there wasn't, you are quite capable of saying there isn't when

there is. You are just saying it now to get me to get down."

Campbell: "Upon my honor, I'm not."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, don't talk to me of honor! The honor of a man who could revel—yes, *revel*—in the terrors of helpless women—"

Campbell: "No, no; I'd no idea of it, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "You will please not address me in that way, Mr. Campbell. You have forfeited all right to do so."

Campbell: "I know it. What I did was very foolish and thoughtless."

Mrs. Somers: "It was very low and ungentlemanly. I suppose you will go away and laugh over it with your—associates."

Campbell: "Why not say my ruffianly accomplices at once, Amy? No, I assure you that unless you tell of the affair, nobody shall ever hear of it from me. It's too disastrous a victory. I'm hoist by my own petard, caught in my own mousetrap. There is such a thing as succeeding too well."

Mrs. Somers: "I should *think* you

"'THERE NEVER WAS ANY MOUSE HERE'"

would be ashamed of it. Suppose you *have* shown that women are nervous and excitable, does that prove anything?"

Campbell: "Nothing in the world."

Mrs. Somers: "Very likely some of us will be sick from it. I dare say you think that would be another triumphant argument."

Campbell: "I shouldn't exult in it."

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know when I shall ever get over it myself. I have had a dreadful shock."

Campbell: "I'm sorry with all my heart—I am, indeed. I had no conception that you cared so much for mice—despised them so much."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh yes, laugh, do! It's quite in character. But if you have such a contempt for women, of course you wouldn't want to *marry* one."

Campbell: "Yes, I should, my dear. But *only* one."

Mrs. Somers: "Very well, then! You can find some *other* one. All is over between *us*. Yes! I will send you back the precious gifts you have lavished upon me, and I will thank you for mine. A

man who can turn the sex that his mother and sister belong to into ridicule can have no real love for his wife. I am glad that I found you out in time."

Campbell: "Do you really mean it, Amy?"

Mrs. Somers: "Yes, I mean it. And I hope it will be a lesson to you. If you find any other poor, silly, trusting creature that you can impose yourself upon for a gentleman as you have upon me, I advise you to reserve your low, vulgar, boyish tricks till after she is helplessly yours, or she may tear your hateful ring from her finger and fling it—" She attempts to pull a ring from her finger, but it will not come off. "Never mind! I will get it off with a little soapsuds; and then—"

Campbell: "Oh no, my dear! Come, I can allow for your excitement, but I can't stand everything, though I admit everything. When a man has said he's played a silly part he doesn't like to be told so, and as for imposing myself upon you for a gentleman—you must take that back, Amy."

Mrs. Somers: "I do. I take it back. There hasn't been any imposture. I *knew* you were not a gentleman."

Campbell: "Very good! Then I'm not fit for a lady's company, and I don't deny, though you're so hard upon me, that you're a lady, Amy. Good-bye." He bows and walks out of the room.

Mrs. Somers, sending her voice after him in a wail of despair: "Willis!"

Campbell, coming back: "Well?"

Mrs. Somers: "I can't let you go." He runs towards her, but she shrinks back on her chair against the wall. "No, no!"

Campbell, hesitating: "Why did you call me back, then?"

Mrs. Somers: "I — I didn't call you back; I just said — Willis."

Campbell: "This is unworthy — even of *you*."

Mrs. Somers: "Oh!"

Campbell: "Do you admit that you have been too severe?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know. What did I say?"

Campbell: "A number of pleasant

things; that I was a fraud, and no gentleman."

Mrs. Somers: "Did I say that?"

Campbell: "Yes, you did."

Mrs. Somers: "I must have been very much incensed against you. I beg your pardon for—being so angry."

Campbell: "That won't do. I don't care how angry you are if you don't call me names. You must take them back."

Mrs. Somers: "Do you see my handkerchief anywhere about on the carpet?"

Campbell, looking about, and then finding it: "Yes; here it is." He hands it to her, and she bends forward and takes it from him at arm's-length, whipping it nervously out of his hand. "What's the matter?"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, nothing—nothing! Will you please give me my fan from the table there?" He obeys, and she catches it from him as she has caught the handkerchief. "Thank you! Keep away, please!"

Campbell, angrily: "Really this is too much. If you are afraid of touching me—"

Mrs. Somers: "No, I don't mind touching you; that isn't it. But if you stood so near, don't you see, it might run up *you*, and jump on to *me*."

Campbell: "What might?"

Mrs. Somers: "You know. The mouse."

Campbell: "The mouse! There *is* no mouse."

Mrs. Somers: "That's what you said before."

Campbell: "Well, it's true. There isn't any mouse, and there never was."

Mrs. Somers: "There's the *idea*. And that's all I ever cared for."

Campbell: "Well, what are you going to do? I can't kill the idea of a mouse, and I can't drive it out of the room."

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know what I'm going to do. I suppose I shall die here." She presses her handkerchief to her eyes. "I shall never get out of the room alive. Then I hope you will be satisfied."

Campbell: "Amy, how can you say such things to me?"

Mrs. Somers: "Oh, I suppose you're fond of me, in your contemptuous way.

I never denied that. And I'm sorry, I'm sure, if I wounded your feelings by anything I said."

Campbell: "Then you admit that I am a gentleman?"

Mrs. Somers: "I didn't say that."

Campbell: "And I can't be satisfied with less. I'll own that I've been stupid, but I haven't been ungentlemanly. I can't remain unless you do."

Mrs. Somers: "And do you think threatening me is gentlemanly?"

Campbell: "That isn't the question. Do you think I'm a gentleman?"

Mrs. Somers: "You're what the *world* calls a gentleman—yes."

Campbell: "Do *you* think I'm one?"

Mrs. Somers: "How can I tell? I can't think at all, perched up here."

Campbell: "Why don't you get down, then?"

Mrs. Somers: "You know very well why."

Campbell: "But you'll have to get down some time. You can't stay there always."

Mrs. Somers: "Why should you care?"

Campbell: "You know I do care. You know that I love you dearly, and that I can't bear to see you in distress. Shall I beat the carpet, and you scream and make a rush?"

Mrs. Somers: "No; I haven't the strength for that. I should drop in a faint as soon as I touched the floor."

Campbell: "Oh, good heavens! What am I going to do, then?"

Mrs. Somers: "I don't know. You got me into the trouble. I should think you could get me out of it."

Campbell, after walking distractedly up and down the room: "There's only one way that I can think of, and if we're not engaged any longer, it wouldn't do."

Mrs. Somers, yielding to her curiosity, after a moment's hesitation: "What is it?"

Campbell: "Oh, unless we're still engaged, it's no use proposing it."

Mrs. Somers: "Can't you tell me without?"

Campbell: "Impossible."

Mrs. Somers, looking down at her fan: "Well, suppose we are still engaged,

then?" Looking up: "Yes, say we *are* engaged."

Campbell: "It's to carry you out."

Mrs. Somers, recoiling a little: "Oh! do you think that would be very nice?"

Campbell: "Yes, I think it would. We can both scream, you know."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes?"

Campbell: "And then you fling yourself into my arms."

Mrs. Somers: "Yes?"

Campbell: "And I rush out of the room with you."

Mrs. Somers, with a deep breath: "I would never do it in the world."

Campbell: "Well, then, you must stay where you are."

Mrs. Somers, closing her fan: "You're not strong enough." She puts her handkerchief into her pocket. "You would be sure to fall." She gathers her train in one hand. "Well, then, look the other way!" Campbell turns his face aside and waits. "No, I can't do it."

Campbell, retiring wrathfully to the other side of the room: "What shall we do, then?"

Mrs. Somers, after reflection: "I don't know what we shall do. But if I were a man—"

Campbell: "Well, if you were a man—"

Mrs. Somers: "Don't you think Mrs. Curwen is fascinating?"

Campbell: "*She* does."

Mrs. Somers: "You must admit she's clever? And awfully stylish?"

Campbell: "I don't admit anything of the kind. She's always posing. I think she made herself ridiculous standing there on the table."

Mrs. Somers, fondly: "Oh, do you think so? You are very severe."

Campbell: "Come, now, Amy, what has all this got to do with it?"

Mrs. Somers: "Nothing. But if I were a man—"

Campbell: "Well?'

Mrs. Somers: "Well, in the first place, I wouldn't have got you wrought up so."

Campbell: "Well, but if you had! Suppose you had done all that I've done, and that I was up there in your place standing on a chair, and wouldn't let you leave the room, and wouldn't get down and

walk out, and wouldn't allow myself to be carried, what should you do?"

Mrs. Somers, who has been regarding him attentively over the top of her fan, which she holds pressed against her face: "Why, I suppose if you wouldn't let me help you willingly—*I should use violence.*"

Campbell: "You witch!" As he makes a wild rush upon her, the curtain, which in the plays of this author has a strict regard for the *convenances,* abruptly descends.

THE END

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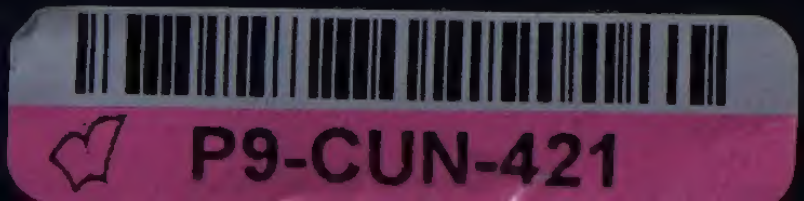
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